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A Critique of Empiricism in
the Old Education

Jen-min Chiao-yu (People's
Education), by Li Chih-ch'in,
Peiping, 1 Dec 1950

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By: Li Chih-sh'ien

SUMMARY

Rapid strides have been made in educational and cultural affairs since liberation, but economic reconstruction demands greater efforts and broader developments in these fields. To assure the wide development of education, it is necessary to have a firm grasp of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's "thinking" to guide our educational methods. Empirical education is a stumbling block to educational expansion and must be eradicated. However this does not mean we are opposed to "practical experience" in education, which is an entirely different matter.

Empirical education is blind, narrow, doctrinaire and disorganized.

These are some of the manifestations of empirical education:

Advocates of empirical education ^{let} smugly believe that their subjective experience in educational work gives them a thorough understanding of educational problems and local conditions, consequently they conduct no investigations or research. It cannot, however, be denied that they have some understanding of local conditions and some educational experience. But educational experience of one particular period and knowledge of conditions in one area are not necessarily applicable at another time and place, because these vary. Local educational cadres, especially among the older workers, have shown serious deviations in this respect. Long participation in revolutionary work made them indifferent to research, and they acquired a narrow subjective outlook. This should be investigated by educational cadres.

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The new-democratic principles of education and investigation and research should be based on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's thinking. Great results have been accomplished in research and investigation since the central authorities decided to carry out this program. The old empirical educators grudgingly participated in research and investigation, but only in a superficial way. These are two examples of their weaknesses:

They go about research and investigation blindly, not knowing what the problems are and what must be investigated to help solve a particular problem. They neglect to investigate such vital facts as population of a school area, manpower, land, quantity of harvest, living conditions of the masses, customs and habits, etc. They gather no facts regarding the educational system, such as school expenditures, curriculum, teachers, teaching methods, extra-curricular activities, and such facts as ages, grades, and individual differences among students. Without proper investigation, educational workers work in the dark.

Secondly empiricists have a narrow view of education. Education should be based on the Marx-Lenin and Mao Tse-tung principle. This means that students should learn that which is practical. In rural areas students studying the national language should learn those characters representing objects that are closest to them, such as their own name and the name of their village etc. In each subject, the content taught should be related to those objects and conditions that are nearest to them and which can be immediately used. Education, however, should not stop at this point; it should advance further, progressing from the simple to the complex, extending from the local to world.

Another principle in the new-democratic education calls for the promotion of "production-education" and student participation in production activities. This principle develops in the student a respect for labor and a "mass" viewpoint. Moreover it helps to increase educational funds and thus reduce the peoples'

financial burden. Since this movement for "production-education" and student participation in production started, income in the new districts have increased. But in the course of this movement many mistakes were made. At times textbooks contained too much material on "production-education," and were virtually production-handbooks. Students in the rural areas participated more actively in production than students in the urban areas. Consequently urban students require more production activities, while rural students require more cultural education. In promoting "production-education," emphasis should be given to "thought-education." Many schools, for the sake of revenues, emphasized "production-education," and as a result scholastic achievements were poor.

A thorough knowledge of capitalist class-education is necessary to understand the old education and to establish the new. The new education cannot be built without opposing the capitalist educational theory of divorcing "theory" from "practice." In the past many educators in the old liberated areas did not understand capitalist-class education, as a result they were prisoners to those who practiced this form of education in their own areas.

Thirdly
Empiricism manifests itself in education in a doctrinaire and dogmatic fashion. Empirical-education and doctrinaire-education are different, the former regards empiricism as a doctrine while the latter takes experience as a doctrine. Both regard their own doctrine as a measuring rod and neither pays any attention to historical conditions or to the claims of the other. Empirical educators apply superficial methods in directing educational activities. In such important matters as building new schools, the empiricists merely look at the number of schools that existed last year and decide that the number must increase without considering ~~such~~ decisive factors as the standard of living and political and cultural level of the inhabitants. There are other extreme examples where empiricists apply urban educational standards and methods to rural areas and vice-versa. Empiricism must be eradicated and replaced by creativeness if education is going to progress.

The fourth manifestation of empiricism in education is disorganization. This manifestation does not mean the absence of work; it is unorganized and chaotic work that involves a great deal of unplanned activity that produces no results. There is a lot of helter-skelter, but no decisions or plans as to what must receive first priority. Responsible leaders in educational administration are concerned with funds and the cadres - both of which are important - but they neglect the essential purpose of education - learning. In conferences much time is consumed in discussing problems that are unrelated to the main subject. This disorderliness is reflected among elementary students as well as students in the middle schools and universities. These students hold numberless conferences with endless discussions that produce no conclusions. This is a reflection of the small bourgeoisie mentality that arises from an unplanned rural economy where production is haphazard and individually controlled. Many educational cadres come from the small bourgeoisie class and ~~it's~~ quite natural that their work reflects this mentality. Another reason for this disorderliness is the low cultural level of educational workers whose knowledge of common affairs and of Marx-Lenin principles is meager. Furthermore, some educational cadres spend too much time on administrative matters and neglect research.

These are some of methods in which empiricism can be surmounted: (1) Strengthen the study of Marx-Lenin principles and Mao Tse-tungs "thinking" and promote ^{of historical} dialectical materialism. (2) Increase the study of educational policies so that educational practices and methods will conform with policies. (3) Remould the thinking of the educational cadres. (4) Arrange and classify the activities and duties of teachers. There are not enough educational cadres with sufficient knowledge and ability to elevate educational work by themselves. It is essential that all educational organs help teachers solve their difficulties.

Finally, the entire process of eliminating empiricism must
be gradual and not impulsive.